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Vet. Fr. III B. 2569









**REFLECTIONS**  
**ON**  
**S U I C I D E .**

**BY**  
**MADAME DE STAEL,**  
**BARONESS OF HOLSTEIN.**

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*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.*



**LONDON:**  
**PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,**  
**PATERNOSTER ROW.**

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**1813.**





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J. C. BARNARD, SKINNER-STREET, LONDON.

TO  
*HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS*  
THE  
CROWN PRINCE OF SWEDEN.

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SIR,

**T**HE following Reflections on Suicide were written at a period when misfortune had taught me the necessity of invigorating the mind by solitary meditation. It was under your protection that my sufferings were mitigated. I and my children, like the shepherds of Arabia, fled for shelter to the laurel to avoid the

impending storm. I am sensible that your Highness has never considered death, but in its most sublime aspect, that of devotion to the public good. Never has your soul been infected with that despondence which sometimes takes possession of those, who conceive themselves to be blanks in existence. There is, however, no subject within the compass of philosophy, but has engaged the powers of your transcendent genius ; no object, however minute, escapes your comprehensive view.

Hitherto, I have dedicated my works to the memory of my father ; but I have deviated from this practice in asking permission to offer a tribute of respect to your Royal Highness, whose public life presents

an example of all those real virtues, which are alone worthy to receive applause from the thinking part of mankind.

It is, perhaps, your least praise, that even among brave men, you are distinguished by courage and intrepidity, qualities which in you are tempered by a goodness still more sublime. The blood of the warrior, the tears of the poor, even the apprehensions of the feeble are the objects of your watchful humanity. You fear but to witness the sufferings of your fellow creatures. An exalted station has not effaced from your heart its tenderness or sympathy.

It has been said by a Frenchman, that your Royal Highness unites the chivalry of republicanism with that of

royalty, and it is indeed impossible to imagine a degree of generosity not congenial to your character. In the relations of society you are far from imposing restraint by an unnecessary reserve; and it is perhaps not too much to affirm, that you would win the suffrages of a whole nation, one after the other, if every individual, of which it was composed, had the privilege of conversing with you for a quarter of an hour. Yet to this graceful affability you add, that masculine energy which extorts confidence from all superior minds.

The Swedes, once so celebrated for their gallant achievements, inheriting the noble qualities of their ancestors, hail you as the presage of

returning glory. By you, Sir, their rights are respected, no less from principle than from inclination. Under circumstances of peculiar delicacy, you have repeatedly shewn, that you were as zealous to guard the bulwarks of the constitution, as other Princes have been anxious to infringe them. Accustomed to find in these duties no invidious restriction, but a safeguard and support; you have uniformly shewn such a deference for the King's wisdom and experience, as throws a new lustre on the power committed to your trust. Pursue, Sir, the career which presents so glorious a prospect to your view, and you shall teach the world, what it has hitherto been slow to learn, that real intellectual greatness in-

cludes moral excellence, and that the hero who is truly magnanimous, far from despising the human race, believes he is superior to other men, only because he is able to sacrifice his interests for their welfare.

I am, with Respect,

Sir,

Your most humble and obedient Servant,

**NECKAR,**

**BARONESS DE STAEL HOLSTEIN.**



# REFLECTIONS

UPON

# S U I C I D E .



**I**t is for the unhappy we should write, since to the children of prosperity experience is commonly the only instructor, and by them all general ideas are considered as futile and unprofitable.

It is otherwise with the afflicted; reflection is their best, if not their only asylum; insulated by adversity from the distractions of the world, they look into their own hearts with the solicitude of

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## 2 REFLECTIONS UPON SUICIDE.

the sick man, who lies tossing on his bed of pain, to discover some position in which his sufferings may be mitigated.

Suicide originates in misery—a subject worthy of the deepest investigation, since it is one that bears closely on all the moral constitution of man.

I shall endeavour to present new views of the motives which may determine the mind to this action; and of the arguments which might be employed against them. It will be my aim to discuss the question, without prejudice or partiality. It would be cruel to hold up to detestation those who are wretched enough to loath existence; it would be unjust to praise those who shrink from the duties it imposes; to bear the burden, however great, is the test of strength and the triumph of magnanimity\*.

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\* In my work on the Passions, I commended suicide, an inconsiderate sentiment, which I have ever

The enemies of suicide, conscious that their argument rests on the broad basis of reason and duty, often assume a contemptuous language which wounds and irritates their opponents: nor do they scruple to attribute to enthusiasm in general that rashness which is the consequence of ungoverned passion.

It appears to me, however, that suicide is wholly repugnant to the spirit of true enthusiasm, (which is in reality no other than the love of moral excellence), since it is but too obvious how much more noble it is to submit to the decrees of Heaven than to oppose them.

In the following Essay I propose to place the subject of Suicide in three points of view; to consider the effects of suffering

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since deeply regretted. I had then the pride and presumption of youth; but to what purpose should we live, if we did not hope that time should produce amelioration!

#### **4 REFLECTIONS UPON SUICIDE.**

**on the human character—to shew that self-destruction is incompatible with the Christian religion, and to examine in what consists the highest dignity of human nature.**

SECTION I.



**I**T cannot be denied that the impressions produced by pain are no less various and diversified than the character and temper of the individuals who are subject to its influence. The operation of circumstances is so modified by the capacities for suffering and enjoyment in each human being, that the most estimable people are on this point liable to mutual errors and misconception, though the least supportable of all the restrictions imposed on the human mind, is, the incapacity for entering into the feelings of each other.

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It appears to me, that happiness consists in the possession of a destiny which corresponds perfectly with our moral faculties. Our desires are fugitive and often fatal to our repose. But our faculties are as permanent as their necessities are unappeasable. The conquest of the world was perhaps as necessary to Alexander, as the possession of his cottage to the peasant; but from this we are not to infer that the human race are bound to nourish the inordinate ambition of the conqueror, although with such feelings he might be incapable of happiness on any other condition.

It is the capacity for affection; the activity of thought; the value attached to opinion, that renders different modes of existence agreeable to one, and irksome to another; the immutable law of duty is the same for all—but strength and weakness are purely relative, and a profound knowledge of the human heart can alone

enable us to judge correctly of the happiness or misery of those whose feelings are different from our own.

It appears to me futile to dispute on what is purely a matter of sentiment, and the argument should be confined to those principles of action, which, in whatever situation we may be placed, religion and virtue universally prescribe. The causes of misery, and its comparative scale of suffering will be found to vary no less than circumstances and individuals, and it would be as easy to count the waves of the ocean, as to analyse those endless combinations of character which may be produced by nature and destiny. It is conscience only, that being within, so simple, so immutable, that always remains independent of arbitrary feelings—conscience, from whom we might all obtain what we all sigh to possess; the secret peace, which is the sabbath of the soul.

The mass of mankind assimilate less in

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their positive than their negative properties; and it may fairly be presumed that no reflective being will deny, he was free to avoid any immoral action he may have committed. If then we allow, that to endure pain, is one of the conditions annexed to mortal existence, we shall not be exonerated from the trust, by the severity of our trials, or the imperious emotions they have excited. Every individual possesses in his own mind, powers not inadequate to his relative duties, so admirably, both in the moral and the material world, is the *necessary* distributed with a rigorous regard to equality; whilst, for the superfluous, but few objects are selected, and those apparently for the purpose of beauty and embellishment.

On a superficial view, the effects of physical and moral suffering should seem to be the same, since disease is not only pain but calamity. In their final consequences, however, they are widely op-

posed—for whilst the former destroys the body, the latter regenerates the soul.

It is not enough to maintain with the stoics, that pain is no evil—to be resigned, we must feel convinced, that it is in reality a good. Abstractedly considered, any evil, however insignificant, might become insupportable, and so much do the capacities for suffering depend on temperamental irritability, that we should have as little reason to blame the man who killed himself for the prick of a pin, as for a paroxysm of gout, for a slight vexation, or a serious calamity. Any suffering, however trivial, when it fails to ameliorate, must revolt the soul; and there is more injustice in the least privation uselessly inflicted, than in the most afflictive trial which is directed to a noble aim.

It is foreign from my purpose to recur to the intricate metaphysical question on the origin of evil, on which so many philoso-



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phers have so often launched forth their vague unsatisfactory speculations. We are unable to concede liberty to man without allowing the existence of evil,—without liberty we are equally unable to conceive virtue,—or without virtue, immortality. This chain of reasoning, of which the first link is at once incomprehensible and indispensable, contains the charter and constitution of our nature. If we once admit (what reason and sentiment should equally dispose us to believe), that the ways of Providence are always marked by justice (latent or revealed), we shall no longer consider suffering as arbitrary or accidental. On any other principle, indeed, man would have as much reason to complain that the sum of good was incomplete as that the cup of evil overflowed. As well might he repine, that he was not permitted to exist from all eternity, as that he was so soon to resign existence. As rationally, might he chal-

lenge participation with infinity, as expect to evade the conditions of a finite station. And on what basis shall he found his complaints? Would he object to the system of the universe, or merely to that small section of it, in which he is placed, and which forms a proportional part of one grand, simple, harmonious *whole*? Pain is so obviously an element in our moral constitution, essentially necessary to the production of pleasure, that we are even unable to conceive the one, unassociated with the other. The ardour of our desires is measured by the resistance they have to encounter, the *transports* of our joys by the dread of losing them, the vehemence of our affections, by the dangers which menace the objects of our love. Never yet, has human art devised any other means of sundering the gordian knot which unites pain to pleasure, than by the fatal stroke which cuts short the thread of life.

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But it will be urged by the unhappy, that they are willing to agree to that balance of good and evil which prevails in the ordinary course of human events; but that they are hardly used by fortune, their comforts are all swallowed up in one unsparring sentence of proscription; and if the chastisement be greater than they can bear, who shall blame them for seeking to evade the stroke? In the first place, it should be considered, that the umpire, to whom the cause has been referred, resides within our own breast, and is but too much biassed in our favour. Good and evil are relative terms: the same lot which reduces one man to despair, another envies as the summit of felicity. I mean not, by this remark, to invalidate what I have previously said, that the different capacities and habits of feeling should be measured with indulgent candor; I only mean that no one can so correctly estimate his comparative share of suffering, as

to pronounce it unequalled and insupportable. Resignation is a duty imposed on all. The powers of attraction and gravitation, by their mature agency, preserve the harmony of the universe. In the soul of man exist two moral principles equally opposed—the love of action, and the necessity of submission, which are exhibited in self-will and resignation; these are, in a manner the two poles of his mind, and the equilibrium of reason is found between them.

To the mass of mankind there exist but two principles of action, their *own will* and *fortune*; and they often act as if they flattered themselves that the energy of the former could counteract the operations of the latter: the complexion of their minds is always fluctuating between pride and petulance; when they are disappointed, they curse their lot like spoiled children, who beat the table against which they have given themselves a blow.

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When they are prosperous, they take to themselves the merit of success, and view well with much complacency on the means they have employed to obtain so desired an end.

The will of man, it is true, often appears to harmonize with the decrees of destiny, but when that will is counteracted, and destiny assumes the fixed, irrevocable character of necessity, it is then a visible manifestation of Providence, which leaves no choice between sullen discontent and virtuous resignation. A man of talents has said that *necessity invigorates*. It is only by taking large and comprehensive views that we shall learn to adopt this opinion in its full extent; yet we are all accustomed to recognize in the chain of circumstances, a fatality we are unable to resist. We all cherish a sort of superstitious deference for the name of fortune, that visionary fantastic being, with whose image we associate so many hopes and fears; that

strange, mysterious power, by turns abrupt and slow, unforeseen and anticipated, which, seizing life at a certain epoch, irresistibly determines its future course. So far, however, from being blind, fortune appears to make us the objects of her penetrating scrutiny, and seldom fails to attack us in that weakness where we are most susceptible. In her we find the secret tribunal, to whose sentence we must submit without appeal. Yet, if its decisions should sometimes appear unjust, we perhaps, and we only, are conscious what truths they intimate, or what lessons they prescribe.

It is unquestionable, that whenever we submit to adversity with mild magnanimity, we are refined and improved by the test. The noblest faculties of the soul are developed in suffering, and so salutary is this moral process of amelioration, that after a certain interval, it seldom fails to restore us to tranquillity. The dance of

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life begins again, and leads us back to those days of innocence, which preceded our errors. To rush on self-destruction, because we are miserable, is therefore to desert the standard of virtue—to reject even the invitation to happiness which virtue reserves for those who combat with themselves, and by her aid, are victorious in the conflict.

It was an axiom with the Platonists, that the soul must sojourn on earth till it should be purified from its guilty passions. It should seem indeed that we were destined to *live* only that we might learn to renounce *life*. In the vegetable world renovation is produced by destruction, in the mind of man, it is effected by sacrifice. Human existence, properly understood, is directed to self-annihilation, or the subjection of all petty individual interests, to the principles of eternal truth and justice.

Children exist but for themselves; young people the same, with the addition, however, of those cherished objects who form part of their being; but no sooner do the heralds of decay approach, than it becomes necessary to draw consolation from general views, if we would not abandon to chagrin the last half of life. A few circumstances, in the situation of any individual, whether favourable or unfavourable, are of little moment, in comparison with the rigid laws of nature. Old age and death, those two inveterate evils, inseparable from human destiny, present mankind with more terrible pains and privations than they can experience from any other source of suffering: yet we submit easily to the common lot, though we always revolt from our own portion of care or sorrow, without reflecting that these heaviest trials imposed on human nature, are incident to every



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situation, and that other accidental differences are rather fictitious than real.

In considering the moral dignity of man, I shall contrast suicide with self-devotion ; I shall point out the difference between the sacrifice of ourselves for another's sake, or what is the same thing, for virtue's sake, and the surrender of existence, because it gives us more pain than pleasure. In offering up life, for the preservation of our fellow-creatures, we may be said to immolate the body to the soul ; but in rushing on destruction, to escape what we hate or dread, we sacrifice our principles to our passions. It is, however, wrong to stigmatize suicide as an act of turpitude, a harsh sentence, which excites repugnance in every liberal mind. On the other hand, we should not identify the nobler bravery which resists evil with that negative courage which fears every thing but death. When

the sacrifice is not sanctified by religious sentiment, something like a ferocious transport is necessary to vanquish that instinctive principle of self-preservation which watches over our existence. It is not unusual for those who have made many abortive attempts to commit suicide, to desist at length from the attempt, and quietly to resume their accustomed habits and avocations. In this as in every other irregularity, arising from the passions, there is a species of frenzy which having reached its climax, gradually subsides to tranquillity or indifference. It may also be observed, that misery has seldom a positive object. Subtract our disappointed hopes, add to these, our *visionary* fears, and the sum of evils we had considered incalculable, shall be reduced perhaps to a few chagrins, not even equivalent to one great calamity.

A sudden shock often restores us to ourselves, the mind regains its tone, and

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the grief which had baffled all measure or comparison, assumes a new aspect.

If you see, after an interval of ten years, a person who had been condemned to some great privation (of whatever nature it might be), you will discover that his pains and pleasures are now derived from a source wholly different from the subject of his former sufferings. It follows not, from this, that happiness should be restored to his soul, but its hopes and fears have now taken another course, and it is in the activity of these two sentiments that our moral being consists.

There is one cause of suicide which interests almost every female heart, and his is love.

It is, surely, the charm of that passion which so often seduces our better judgment on the subject of self-murder, so well are we pleased to observe its influence in subjecting all the higher powers of the

soul, and that nothing can resist its universal empire. It has been the fate of every species of enthusiasm to endure the test of ridicule, and romances have preserved the *illusions* of sentiment in some countries of the world to which good faith had escaped for refuge.

Of all the sufferings, however, to which love is exposed, there is but one, in my judgment, at least, which is truly overwhelming and irreparable—the death of one we love, and by whom we are beloved. A cold shuddering shoots through the frame, a mist flits before our eyes, darkening the face of nature, when the heart that mingled all its feelings with our's, lies cold and insensible in the silent grave.

Yet even this grief, the only one, perhaps, beyond the strength which God has given us, has by many been considered as more supportable than the irritation of jealousy or the stings of ingratitude. But when the object of our affection

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proves unfaithful, it is self-love that distils the poison, though the heart receives the wound. Undoubtedly we suffer from a better feeling than self-love, when we are compelled to withdraw our esteem from the supreme object of our affections, —when of an enthusiasm once so deep so *universal*, there remains but a vain remembrance and a more vain regret. In such instances, however, there is one reflection which presses on us with unwelcome truth, that, in an union of perfect confidence, such an union as can only subsist between two pure noble beings when one of the partners violates the bond of fidelity, he must have been unworthy of the sentiment he had inspired, and ought not to be the object of lasting regret. Far be it from me, by this process of reasoning, to imitate those pedants who reduced the pains of life to a certain number of syllogisms. One suffers from a thousand causes, in a thousand

ways, from sentiments the most various, opposed, and contradictory, we are open to pain at every pore. No one is authorized to contest another's right to grieve; but in all those chagrins of sentiment which are blended with the feelings of self-love, it is equally absurd and culpable to think of self-destruction. Whatever belongs to vanity is of a transitory nature; and we should beware how we suffer what is transitory to launch us into what is eternal. It is only when the sorrows of the heart are pure, from the suggestions of pride, that they can induce us to embrace death; but the sorrows that flow from sensibility lose their bitterness in the consolations administered by religion. Providence, which wills that all human sufferings should be healed, brings balm to the soul that has received too rude a blow. In the hour of desolation the angel of peace spreads his tutelary wings around us, and who knows but

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this benignant angel is the object of our tender regrets? who knows but that, touched with our tears, he has obtained from heaven the privilege of watching over her who sorrowed without hope? Since then the sufferings of disappointed affection are modified by time, and the regrets of genuine tenderness softened by religious resignation, it follows that love can suggest no adequate motive for committing suicide. In modern times this action most commonly originates in ruin and disgrace. As society is constituted, a reverse of fortune occasions acute distress, and multiplies suffering under a thousand forms:—the most cruel of all, perhaps, is the loss of that rank we occupied in the world. The imagination acts equally on the future and the past, and one makes with our former possessions an alliance, of which the rupture is dreadful. After a certain interval, however, a new situation creates a new perspective. Hap-

piness is so much made up of relative sensations, that it is not any positive circumstance, but its connexion with yesterday or to-morrow, that influences the mind.

Let the man, who is under the apprehension of some signal calamity be informed, that half of what he dreaded is remitted to him, and his feelings shall be totally different from what he would have experienced, had his previous terrors been less strongly excited. On some occasions, fortune enters into terms of composition with her sufferers, and seems, like other despots, to feel a tardy repentance for the injury she has committed.

Opinion exercises over most individuals, an imperious action, of which it is difficult to diminish the force. The word, I am *dishonoured*, overwhelms the soul of social man; nor, is it possible to withhold our pity from one, who sinking under the weight of opprobrium, shelters himself in death, from, it may be, unmerited

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reproach. It will here be proper to range, under two distinct classes, the causes of disgrace, those which have been produced by our delinquencies, and those which arise from errors, involuntary, or at least, not criminal. Remorse necessarily includes the idea we form of Divine justice: for if we compare not our actions with this supreme Type of Equity, we shall not experience a stronger sentiment than regret.

We may consider human life in a two-fold view, either as a game of chance, of which the gain or the loss consists, in the possessions of this world, or as a probation for eternity. If we belong to the former, we shall estimate our conduct merely as its consequences are likely to affect our temporal interests; if we take future existence into the calculation, we must submit our intentions to the scrutiny of conscience. The man whose views extend not beyond this terrestrial scene,

may have regrets; but it is only the religious man, that is accessible to remorse. Sensible that expiation is his first duty, he yields to the conviction of conscience, that he is bound to bear the consequences of his fault, and to devote his future life to reparation and atonement. To the disgrace incurred by his fault, he submits as to a punishment he has no right to evade; and assuredly, though there are many crimes of a deeper dye than suicide, there is none by which man appears so formally to renounce the protection of God.

Other passions precipitate us into crimes, of which the object is happiness; but suicide implies a dereliction of faith and hope, which cannot be reconciled with any sentiments of piety.

Whoever is truly touched with remorse, will exclaim with the prodigal son, "I know what I will do, I will arise and go to my father, and say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and

am no more worthy to be called thy son." It is with such touching submission the religious being expresses penitence ; and the more guilty he appears in his own eyes, the less will he think himself at liberty to dispose of his life, since he has hitherto failed to perform the duties exacted by him from whom he received the gift. With regard to those delinquents who have no belief in a future state, and whose respectability in this world is irreparably lost, to them, suicide can be objectionable, merely as it may deprive them of the few lucky chances they may still retain, the value of which is to be measured by the common calculations of probabilities.

I believe it may be affirmed, that unmerited dishonour is never permanent. The influence of truth over the public mind is such, that sooner or later we shall surely be reinstated in its esteem. Time possesses something of a sanctity which

appears to act independently even of the events it unfolds. It is a support to the weak and unfortunate ; it is, in fact, one of the mysterious forms, under which the Deity manifests himself to man.

The Public, in many respects, so different from the individual, and which, though composed of many stupid beings, is in itself an expanded intelligent mind ; the Public which possesses generosity, though numberless acts of selfishness and folly are committed in its name, that Public, always finishes by rallying on the side of justice, whenever predominant and momentary circumstances disappear. " In patience possess you your souls," says the evangelist. It is the precept both of piety and reason, and like many others contained in the sacred writings, at once conveys the best counsel against worldly care, and imparts the best means for securing worldly prosperity.

Physical infirmities, incurable maladies, and in fine all those miseries which are in the train of corporeal existence afford, the most plausible reasons for suicide, yet it is rarely, particularly amongst the moderns, that sorrows of this description have ever produced that effect. By evils which flow in the common course of nature, we are oppressed but not overwhelmed; there must be a mixture of irritation in what we suffer before we surrender ourselves to that anger against destiny, from which we wish to be enfranchised or avenged as against the yoke of an oppressor.

There is a singular species of error in the manner in which the common lot is considered by the greater part of mankind, and so much does it influence our mental impressions, that it cannot be too strongly exposed. It should seem that the task of resignation was easy when many participated in our misfortunes, since we

only discover injustice in individual evils : but are not these varieties in general compensated, and are they not, I repeat, equally comprehended in the laws of nature ?

I shall not here insist on those common place consolations suggested by the hope of a change in circumstances : (there are some evils not susceptible of this comfort), but I believe it may be boldly pronounced, that a course of study has solaced the greatest part of those by whom it has been sought. In every occupation there is some view to the future, and of this future man has the most incessant need. Our faculties, like the vulture of Prometheus, devour our souls if they have no action beyond ourselves. When we possess imagination, (the greater part of those who suffer, possess too much), we find pleasure always renewed in studying the best productions of the human mind, whether we enjoy them as admirers, or as artists. A female genius has said, that " lassitude

is always mingled with grief," and this reflection is profound. Real lassitude, that which is endured by active minds, is an absence of interest for surrounding objects, combined with those faculties which render the interest necessary; it is the torment of thirst, without the means of gratification, and Tantalus is the precise image of a mind thus affected. Occupation restores the taste for existence, and the fine arts possess at once the originality of individual objects, and, the sublimity of universal ideas. They facilitate our intercourse with nature, which we may indeed love without the assistance of these agreeable mediators, but which we learn from them to enjoy with a superior relish.

Whatever may be the sorrows into which we are precipitated, we ought never to forget the primary gifts of the Creator, life and nature. Man in society attaches too much importance to the chain of circumstances of which his indi-

vidual history is composed. Existence possesses in itself a wonderful charm : how earnestly does the sick man invoke this blessing ? savages are happy with this boon alone ; the prisoner represents the pure open air as the supreme good ; the blind would sacrifice all they possess for the gift of sight ; the climates of the south which animate colours, and diffuse perfumes, produce an indescribable emotion in the human frame, and philosophical consolations have less power over the mind than the enjoyments occasioned by a view of the earth and the Heavens. What then we ought chiefly to cultivate as the means of happiness, is the power of contemplation. We are so bounded in ourselves, so many circumstances agitate and wound us, that we have incessant need for plunging into that ocean of boundless thought, which like the Styx may render us if not invulnerable, at least resigned.



None of us will venture to say, that we can support whatever befalls us in this world, none will dare so to confide in his own strength, as to answer for this. There are few beings, even of such as are endowed with superior faculties, whom despair has not more than once attacked, and life frequently appears only a continued storm, the wrecks of which are friendship, love, and glory. The banks of that time, which has flowed during the course of life, are covered by their fragments. But when we have preserved the interior harmony of the soul, we may still enter into a communication with the works of the Divine Being.

The mercy of God, the repose of death, a certain beauty in the organisation of the universe, which is not intended to satiate man, but to predict to his mind happier hours. Immutable, exalted ideas, always are in a manner the Divine harmonies of nature, and diffuse calm

into the soul, by which they are understood. From these sources poets and heroes draw their divine inspirations. Why then should not some drops from that cup which elevated them above mortality be salutary to ourselves?

We accuse fate of malignity, because it always strikes upon the most sensitive part of our nature; yet we ought not to accuse the malignity of fate, but the impetuosity of our desires, which precipitate us against opposing obstacles, as in the ardour of combat we inadvertently rush forward upon the sword of the enemy. Besides this, the instruction which ought to result from misfortune, bears with the greatest force upon that part of our character which has the most need to be repressed. We cannot admit a belief in God without supposing that he directs chance in its operation upon man. We cannot then conceive this chance to be a blind power, and it therefore remains to be

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considered, whether he by whom it is governed has granted to man the liberty either to submit or to withdraw from its influence. We shall proceed to consider this in the second part of these reflections.

## SECTION II.

*What are the Laws imposed upon us by the Christian Religion, relatively to Suicide?*

WHEN Job the man of grief was attacked by every species of misfortune, when he was deprived of his possessions and his children, and was bowed down by the most poignant bodily sufferings, his wife exhorted him to renounce life, to "curse God and die." "What," replied he, "shall I receive good from the hand of God and not evil," and by whatever sorrow he was assailed, this reflection reconciled him to his situa-

tion and his patience received its reward. It has been generally believed that Job preceded Moses, but at least he existed before the Advent of Jesus Christ, and in an epoch when the hope of immortality was not guaranteed to the human race.

What then at this time would have been his thoughts? We observe in the Bible, men such as Sampson and the Maccabees devote themselves to death for the accomplishment of a design which they believed exalted and useful, but in no instance do we find examples of suicide where a disgust to the evils of life are the only cause. In no part has this desertion of our appointed lot been considered even as possible. It has been frequently observed, that there is no passage in the Gospel which conveys a positive disapprobation of this act, but as the discourses of Jesus Christ rather trace the principles of conduct than the detailed application

of the law, is it not sufficiently clear that the general spirit of the Gospel tends to inculcate the most entire resignation to the Divine will?

*Blessed are they who mourn, says Christ, for they shall be comforted, if any one will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me. When ye are persecuted for my sake, happy are ye.* In all places he announces that his mission is to teach men that the design of human evil is to purify the soul, and that celestial happiness is obtained by our religious endurance of them. This is the precise intention of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and elucidates the mystery of evil.

We may find many beautiful passages respecting social morality both in the Hebrew prophets, and amongst the Pagan philosophers, but Jesus Christ descended upon earth to preach charity, patience, and faith, and these virtues tend equally to

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comfort the miserable. The first, charity, inculcates our duty to others; the second, patience, instructs us in these consolations to which we ought to recur; and the third, faith, announces their recompence. The greater part of the evangelical maxims would be deficient in their basis if they permitted the infliction of voluntary death; for sorrow inspires the mind with the necessity of calling upon God, and the insufficiency of worldly possessions renders the prospect of another life peculiarly necessary.

In the intoxication of prosperity we rarely observe a holy respect for what is sacred. The attraction towards worldly happiness is so lively, that all other objects fade, even the splendour of a future existence. It was once said by a German philosopher, *to obtain such a thing I would subtract two millions of years from my eternal felicity*, and he was singularly moderate in the sacrifice which

he offered, since temporal enjoyments are commonly much more lively than religious hopes, and spiritual life or christianity, which is one and the same thing, would cease to exist if sorrow had no root in the heart of man. Deliberate suicide is perfectly irreconcilable with the christian faith, which principally rests upon the different duties of resignation.

With respect to suicide occasioned by momentary delirium, or a transport of despair, it is possible the Divine Legislator of the human race never had occasion to speak of it amongst the Jews, who had never exhibited an example of this species of error, though he incessantly combated, in the Pharisees the vices of hypocrisy, insincerity, and unbelief. It might be said that he considered the wrong direction of the passions as maladies of the mind, and not as its natural state, and that he always directed his views more to the general spirit of morality



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than to precepts, which may depend upon particular circumstances.

Jesus Christ incessantly commands mankind not to be occupied with the present life, but as it is connected with immortality. *Why take ye thought for your raiment? behold the lillies of the field! they work not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.* Neither indolence or carelessness are, however, inculcated by this passage, but a species of tranquillity which would be useful even in the common intercourse of the world. Conquerors term this sentiment a confidence in their good fortune; religious men, affiance in the aid of Providence; but both discover in this internal disposition of the mind, a species of support which improves their judgment even of worldly circumstances, and gives them wings to escape its evils.

Some believe they free themselves from the chain of human events by the intention of selfmurder, should they fail in the accomplishment of their desires. In a system like this we must conceive ourselves precisely at our own disposal, and at liberty to quit our situation whenever our satisfaction in it has ceased. If the Gospel accorded with this, we should discover in it some lessons of prudence ; but whatever belongs to virtue can only have a very restrained application, since virtue consists alone in the preference which we give to others, or to the dominion of duty over personal interest, but when we renounce life solely because we no longer enjoy it, we prefer ourselves to others, and descend to the littleness of egotism.

In every religious argument adduced against suicide, that which has the most frequently recurred is the express prohibition in the Decalogue, *Thou shalt not*

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*kill.* Doubtless this argument may be admitted, but as it is impossible to consider the man who destroys his own life with the same eye as an assassin, the true point in view in this question, is, that happiness being the sole end of human life, man ought to labour for perfection, and consider his duties as having nothing to compromise with his sufferings.

It was said by Marcus Aurelius, *that there was no more of evil in parting from life, than in going out of a smoky chamber*; were this really the case, suicide would be much more frequent, for when once the illusion of youth is past, it is difficult to reflect upon the course of past events, and to preserve the same love of existence. We may persist in this existence, through the fear of departing from it, but if this motive alone retained us on earth, all those who have vanquished terror by the habits of a military profession, all those whose ima-

ginations are more impressed by the spectre of life, than with those of death, would spare themselves the long period of suffering, which forms a gloomy contrast to the pleasures of youth.

Rousseau, in his letter upon suicide, has asked, *Why should we be permitted to cut off a leg, if we may not equally take away life? Has not the will of God given us both?* A passage in the Gospel replies precisely to this sophism. *If thy hand offends thee, cut it off. If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.* This passage of the Gospel applies to temptation, and though not to suicide, may be properly used in refutation of the argument of Rousseau. Man is permitted to use his effort for curing every species of physical evil, but he is prohibited from destroying his existence, or, in other words, he has received the power of choosing between good and evil. By this power he exists, by it

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he must be renewed, and every thing is subordinate to that principle of action which is entirely connected with his exertion of liberty.

In encouraging men to support the troubles of life, Jesus Christ incessantly calls their attention to the efficacy of prayer. *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you; Ask, and you shall receive;* but the hopes thus given have no connection with the events of human life; prayer predominates over the dispositions of the mind. Internal tranquillity, and external prosperity, we equally denominate happiness, yet nothing can more essentially differ than these different sources of enjoyment. The philosophers of the eighteenth century have supported morality upon the positive advantages which it procures in society, and have considered it as self-interest well understood. Christianity has transferred the seat of our purest satisfactions to the recesses of

the soul. The philosophers promise temporal advantages to the virtuous, and on some accounts they are right; for in the common course of events it is probable that the blessings of this life accompany moral conduct; but if the expectation respecting this was chimerical, despair might then be legitimate; for virtue being merely considered as speculative, when that failed, existence might be quitted.

Christianity, on the contrary, places happiness supremely in the impressions dependent upon conscience. Have we not frequently proved, even apart from religious considerations, that our internal feelings were not always in unison with our circumstances, and that we have experienced more or less of happiness than would have resulted from a right view of our situation? If this is a simple effect of the weakness of human nature, how much of increased power may be produced in the mind by the holy and secret

influence of piety? Let us ask those virtuous beings who have been visited by affliction, whether they have not sometimes experienced an unexpected tranquillity of soul? In such moments a strain of celestial harmony is heard in the desert, and it seems to announce that the rock shall pour forth the living waters.

When Louis XVI. the most virtuous and respectable victim, faction ever immolated, was led to the scaffold, he was asked what assistance would in this abyss of misfortune be granted him from the hand of God? In a moment was heard the angelic invocation in the voice of the minister who attended him, exclaiming, *Son of St. Louis ascend to heaven!* His worldly greatness, his celestial hopes were united in these simple words. In recalling to his mind his illustrious race, they elevated him above the ignominy to which he was subjected, they invoked his forefathers, who extended their crowns to

welcome the arrival of the Saint into celestial mansions. Perhaps in this instant he perceived them with the eye of faith. He approached the boundaries of time, and our calculations of its progress concerned him no more. Who knows what delights the effects of one compassionate sentiment might produce in his soul?

When a sanguinary hand bound those hands which had borne the sceptre of France, the same envoy of God addressed his king with the words, *Sire, this was our Lord conducted to death.* What assistance must he have afforded to the martyr in recalling this divine model! In fact, is not the most sublime instance of the sacrifice of life the basis of christian belief? and does not this example strongly contrast the difference between the martyr and the self-destroyer. The martyr serves the cause of religion by shedding his blood for the benefit of man-



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kind; he who is guilty of suicide perverts every sentiment of courage, and makes his death his disgrace. The martyr instructs men in the power of conscience, which can elevate him above the strongest physical evil; the self-destroyer proves also the power of will over conscience, but it is that of a distracted charioteer who is no longer capable of holding the reins of his car, and precipitates himself into an abyss instead of directing it to its proper destination. It may be said that in the commission of this terrible crime the mind experiences a degree of fury which in one instant concentrates an eternity of torments.

The concluding scene in the life of Jesus Christ, seems peculiarly intended to confute those who contend for the right of destroying life, to escape misfortune. The dread of suffering seized him who had willingly devoted himself to death for the good of mankind. He prayed a long time to his Father in the

garden of the Mount of Olives, and his countenance was shaded by the anguish of death. *My Father*, he cried, *if it is possible let this cup pass from me.* Thrice with tears was this prayer repeated. All the sorrows of our nature had passed through his divine mind; like us he feared the violence of men, like us perhaps he regretted those whom he had cherished and loved, his mother and his disciples; like us, (probably more forcibly than us,) he loved this earth, and the celestial pleasures resulting from active benevolence for which he incessantly thanked his Father. But not able to avert the destined chalice, he cried, *Oh, my Father, let thy will be done*, and resigned himself into the hands of his enemies. What more can be sought for in the Gospel respecting resignation to grief, and the duty of supporting it with fortitude and patience?

The resignation we obtain by religious belief is a kind of moral suicide, and in

that respect is precisely the reverse of suicide itself; for the end of self-renunciation is consecrated to the good of others, whilst suicide occasioned through disgust to life is only sanguinary mourning for individual happiness.

St. Paul observes that *those who pass their lives in pleasure are dead while they live*. Every page in the sacred writings shows the great difference understood between the man of the world and that of eternity. The former places life in what the other considers as spiritual death. It is then to be expected that the worldly man should honour suicide, whilst he who directs his views to immortality exalts martyrdom; for whoever founds his morals upon earthly happiness, detests life when it deceives his promise, whilst he who makes real felicity consist in his communications with the Deity, may enjoy happiness in defiance of man, and we may even say in despite of fortune. When

the afflictions of life have taught us the insufficiency of our own strength, and the omnipotence of God, there is produced in the soul a species of regeneration, the sweetness of which is inexpressible. Men then judge themselves as they judge others, place their consciences between their own personal interests and those of their opponents, remain calm under their own appointed lot, in the conviction that the issues of it are not in their hands. Self-love is also subdued, from the certainty that it is not from themselves, but from mankind at large to whom they may look for justice. They are in fine, tranquillized under the most insupportable evil, that of the injustice of friends, either in the acknowledgment of their own imperfections, or in confiding to the bosom of him who has best loved them their most secret thoughts, or in directing their sensibility to the Being whence it is derived. What a difference is there between this

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religious self-denial to terrestrial warfare, and the fury by which men are led to sink under their sufferings! Self renunciation is indeed in every respect adverse to suicide.

In addition to this, how can we believe ourselves secured by suicide from the troubles with which we are pursued? What certainty has the Atheist of annihilation? or the Sophist of the mode of existence reserved for him? When Socrates taught the Greeks his doctrine of the immortality of the soul, many of his disciples, and some of the studious of his time, devoted themselves to voluntary death, greedy to taste that intellectual life, of which the confused images of Paganism had not presented a single idea. The emotion which must be occasioned by so novel a doctrine, might easily bewilder persons of ardent imagination; but how are Christians, to whom the promises of future life have been united with

threatenings of retributory justice, how can they hope that suicide will terminate their sufferings? If the soul survives death will the sentiment by which it has been filled, whatever may be its nature, compose no longer a-part? Who can know what connection may exist between earthly remembrances and celestial enjoyments? Ought man from his own suggestions to brave that dangerous shore from whence he is naturally repulsed by the strongest terrors? How can we destroy by wilful caprice, (and such may be termed every sentiment not founded upon duty) the work of God in our hearts? How determine upon death when we could not have secured birth? How answer for our eternal state when the most trivial actions in this transient scene of existence have occasioned the most poignant regrets? Who can conceive he is able to controul those operations

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of destiny which govern his state in life, and say, it is too much?

In resorting to suicide men equally revolt against nature and nature's God. Natural death is commonly ameliorated by the decline of our natural powers, and in sacrificing life to its duties we are supported by the elevation of virtue; but the self-destroyer seems to arrive with hostile arms upon the opposite banks of the tomb, and boldly challenges the spectres of terror which inhabit its gloomy mansions.

What despair must accompany an action like this! What compassion, what profound compassion should be felt for its miserable object; but let not human pride be blended in the action. Let not the unhappy conceive he is more a man for being less a Christian, and that an intelligent being knows not where to place the moral dignity of man.

## SECTION III.

*Of the Moral Dignity of Man.*

**T**HE greater proportion of individuals in their present state of existence attend either to their own natural good, or to their consideration in the world, and in the multitude these two objects are united. But the importance of the former, consists in the ascendancy acquired by power and fortune; and in the latter the respect inspired by talents and virtue. Those who pursue power and fortune desire however that they should be considered as possessed of moral qualities, and still more of superior talents; but this is only a secondary object, which must yield to



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the preceding; for the depraved knowledge of mankind teaches us that the most solid advantages of this life are those which procure us the assistance rather than the esteem of men.

We may leave here as perfectly foreign to the subject those whose ambition has no object superior to fortune and power, but shall examine with attention in what consists the moral dignity of man, and this examination will necessarily lead us to consider the immolation of life under two precisely opposite points of view, the sacrifice inspired by virtue, and the disgust which results from disappointed passion. We have already in connection with religion opposed martyrdom to suicide, and we may in connection with moral dignity produce the contrast between a devotedness to duty, and a rebellion against our circumstances in life.

A devotedness to duty would commonly induce us rather to receive than to inflict

death, yet there are amongst the ancients instances of suicide proceeding from this source. Curtius threw himself into the gulph to fill it up; Cato fell upon his sword to convince the world that one free spirit existed under the dominion of Cæsar; but such men do not destroy themselves merely to escape from sorrow; the first desired to save his country; and the other offered an example to the world, the ascendancy of which still exists. Cato passed the preceding night in perusing the Phædon of Socrates in which suicide is precisely condemned; but this exalted patriot knew that he made not the sacrifice to himself, but to the cause of liberty, and according to circumstances this cause may exact the waiting for death like Socrates, or the infliction of death like Cato.

The characteristic of true moral dignity in man is a devotedness to duty. What we perform on our individual ac-

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count may possess a degree of greatness which commands admiration, but this admiration is only due to the sacrifice of self under whatever form it may be presented. An elevated mind incessantly tends to free us from whatever is purely selfish, and to unite us to the sublime views of the Creator of the universe. The powers of affection and thought only comfort and exalt us when they tear the mind from personal impressions. Duty and enthusiasm diffuse a purer air into the bosom; self-love, irritation, and impatience, are enemies which conscience invokes us to combat, and the series of life in a moral being nearly consists in the continual action and re-action of internal strength against external circumstances, and of external circumstances against this strength. This is the true measure of the greatness of man, but it is only entitled to our admiration in the generous being who opposes himself to himself, and knows

how to make the sacrifice which is required.

Genius and talents may produce great effects in the world, but when their direction has no other object than the personal ambition of the possessor, they no longer constitute a divine nature in man. They are only auxiliaries to address, to prudence, and to all those worldly qualities, the type of which exists in the inferior animals, though its perfection belongs to man. The paw of a fox, or the polluted pen of him who sells his opinion for his interest, is precisely the same as far as respects moral dignity. A man of genius who advances his own interest at the expense of human happiness, however endowed by superior qualities, is really selfish, and the principles of his conduct are merely those of animal life. The distinction between consciousness and instinct, is the feeling and the knowledge of duty, and duty always consists in the

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sacrifice of self to the good of others. The whole problem of moral life is included in this, all the dignity of a human being is in proportion to his force, not only against death, but against existing interests. The other force, that which overturns the obstacles opposed to our desires, has success for its recompence, as well as its object; but he is not more admirable for using his understanding, to subject others to his passions, than for employing his feet to walk, or his hands to receive; and in the estimation of moral qualities, the motive of actions can alone determine their value.

Hegesippus, of Cyrene, the disciple of Aristippus, at the same time inculcated suicide and sensuality. He advanced that men ought to pursue no other object than pleasure in this life, but as it is very difficult to secure enjoyment he recommended death to those by

whom they could not be obtained. This doctrine affords the best motive for suicide, and evinces the species of selfishness with which it is blended, as I have already said with an act by which self must be destroyed.

A Swedish philosopher, named Ro-  
beck, wrote a long dissertation upon sui-  
cide, and killed himself after he had  
composed it. This doctrine was, that  
we should encourage a contempt of life,  
even so far as the commission of hemi-  
cide. Do not the most flagitious charac-  
ters also despise life? Every thing con-  
sists in the motive which produces the  
sacrifice. Suicide, relative to itself, which  
has been carefully distinguished from the  
sacrifice of existence to virtue, proves  
only one thing in respect to courage,  
which is, that the will overpowers physi-  
cal instinct: thousands of soldiers inces-  
santly prove this truth. Inferior ani-  
mals, it is observed, never destroy them-

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selves. Reflection is no part of their nature; they appear at present to be enchained, ignorant of the future, and to have collected nothing but habits from the past. But no sooner are their passions irritated, than they brave danger, and even that last danger, which we call death, of which they have doubtless no idea. The courage of a large proportion of men depends also upon this absence of foresight. Robeck has, therefore, been erroneous in thus exalting the contempt of life. There are two ways in which it may be sacrificed, either because we give to virtue a preference over self, or because we yield the preference to passion, and are unwilling to live, when we have lost the hope of happiness. This sentiment is not entitled to esteem; but to fortify our minds by the operation of our own thoughts, amidst the reverses of life, to support our courage by the exertion we only can make,

by opposing peace of conscience to the irritation of temperament, this is <sup>off</sup> true courage, compared to which what results from the constitution is little, what is inspired by self-love, still less.

Some persons advance that there are circumstances where, finding ourselves only burthensome to others, it becomes a duty to deliver them from the weight. One the most powerful means of introducing an error in morals, is, to suppose situations to which there is nothing to be objected except that they do not exist. Where is the wretch who will never meet a being to whom he may afford some consolation? Where is the unfortunate man who, by his patience and resignation, may not give an affecting example to others, and produce feelings which the most powerful precepts could never inspire? One half of life is its decline: what then has been the intention of the Creator, in presenting this melancholy per-



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pective to man, *to man*, whose imagination requires hope, and who only prizes what he already possesses as the means of obtaining more. It is obvious that the Creator has willed that mortals should depend upon themselves, and that the great effort of disinterestedness should commence long before the waste of strength has rendered it more easy.

No sooner have you attained mature age than you hear your death spoken of. Do you marry your children? you are then called upon to estimate their property when you will be no more. Parental duties consist in a series of sacrifices, and no sooner have children attained the age of reason, than almost all the enjoyments they give are founded upon the sacrifices made to them. If then enjoyment was the only end in life, we ought to destroy ourselves as soon as we cease to be young, when we begin to descend that mountain whose summit was crowned with so many brilliant illusions.

A man of genius, who had been complimented upon the courage with which he had supported great reverses of fortune, replied, "I am even consoled for having past the age of twenty-five." In fact, there are few sorrows more bitter than the loss of youth. It may be said that the mind accustoms itself to this by degrees—without doubt, time is the ally of reason ; it weakens the resistance we are disposed to make, but where is the impetuous mind which is not irritated by the attacks of old age? Are the passions calmed in the same proportion as bodily energies decline? Do we not frequently view a renewal of the punishment of Mezentius, by the union of a living soul with a deceased body, inseparable enemies to each other? What avail these gloomy precursors, which nature has appointed to precede death, if it was not ordained that we should exist without the pleasure, and that we should

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daily resign flower after flower the crown of life.

Savages not having the same ideas of religion or the philosophy of man, conceive they confer a benefit upon their ancestors by killing them when they are old. This action is founded upon the same principle as suicide. It is certain that happiness, in the acceptation of it afforded by the passions, the enjoyments of self-love, at least, can no longer exist for the aged ; but it possesses that, which, by its development of moral dignity, seems to announce the approach of another life, as in the long days of the north, the twilight of evening is mingled with the dawn of the following day. I have seen those noble looks inspired with futurity ; and they seemed to announce, as a prophet, the old man, who was no longer occupied with the cares or pleasures of life, but regenerated by his elevation of mind, as if he had already passed the tomb. Thus may

we be armed against misfortune ;—thus, even in the strength of life, circumstances frequently give the signal for that detachment from existence which time will sooner or later demand.

“ You have very humble thoughts, will be objected by some, who are persuaded that greatness consists in the goods of fortune and our superiority to surrounding objects, when on the contrary, it results from the power of self-command. Such persons contrast Christianity with the philosophical systems of the ancients, and pretend that their doctrines were more favourable to energy of character, than those which have resignation for their basis. But certainly we cannot confound resignation to the will of God, with condescension to the power of man. Those heroic patriots of antiquity, who would rather embrace death than slavery, were capable of a religious submission to the decrees of Heaven, whilst the modern writers;

who assert that Christianity enfeebles the mind, would in defiance of their apparent strength, bend under tyranny with more suppleness than a weak but truly christian-like old man.

Socrates, the most honoured of sages, refused to escape from his prison when he was condemned to die. He conceived it his duty to give an example of obedience to the legislature of his country, though it was unjust towards him. Does not this sentiment belong to real firmness of character? What grandeur was there also in his philosophical conversation upon the immortality of the soul, continued with so much serenity till the instant when the poison was presented to his lips! During two thousand years, men of intellect, heroes, poets, artists, have by their worship, consecrated the death of Socrates; but of those thousands of suicides caused by disgust or the weariness of life, with which the annals of every country of the

world are filled, what traces are left in the remembrance of posterity?

If the ancients are proud of **Socrates**, Christians, without enumerating the martyrs, may produce numerous examples of that noble strength of mind, opposed to which the irritation and dejection which produce suicide, will only appear worthy of pity. **Sir Thomas More**, the chancellor of **Henry the 8th**, was confined during a whole year in the **Tower of London**, and every day rejected the offers made him by a powerful king, to be reinstated in his favor, on condition of suppressing the conscientious scruples for which he had been removed. During one year he learned to die, and died loving life, which redoubles the greatness of his sacrifice. Celebrated as an author, he delighted in those intellectual occupations which filled every hour with continually increasing interest. One beloved daughter, who could appreciate the ge-

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mis of such a father, diffused over the interior of his household a continual charm. Plunged into a dungeon, enclosed within those bars which could only be penetrated by broken and interrupted light, and with the knowledge that, not far from this gloomy residence was a delightful mansion, upon the verdant banks of the Thames, which offered him the re-union of every pleasure which the affections of his family and philosophical studies could afford, yet did he remain unshaken, the scaffold could not intimidate him, his feeble health, rudely shaken, could not weaken his resolution; he found support in the exaltation of the soul, which is unexhaustable, because it is eternal. He died because he willed it; sacrificing to his conscience, happiness, and life; surrendering every enjoyment to that feeling of duty which is the perfection of human nature, that which fructifies the mind, as in the

physical order of the universe, the sun enlightens the world.

England, the birth-place of this virtuous citizen, in which so many others have freely sacrificed life to virtue:---England is distinguished as the country in which the greatest number of suicides are committed; and we are, with reason, astonished, that in a nation where religion exercises an extended and noble empire, the example of such error should be afforded. Those, however, who represent the English as men of cold characters, suffer themselves to be deceived by the reserve of their manners. The English character is, in fact, very lively and even impetuous; their admirable constitution, which in the most exalted degree develops their moral powers, is of itself sufficient to their calls for thought and action; the monotony of existence agrees not with them, though they frequently constrain themselves to it. They then diversify with

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bodily exercises the species of life which to us appear so uniform.

No nation has been so adventurous as the English. From one end of the world to the other, from the fall of the Rhine to the cataracts of the Nile, whatever has been attempted, either singular or daring has been done by the English. Extraordinary wagers, sometimes even blameable excesses are a proof of the vehemence of their character: their respect for the laws, that is, the moral law, the political law, and the laws of decorum, externally repress their natural ardour of character, but it does not the less exist; and when circumstances deprive it of food, when chagrin invades their vivid imagination, the ravages they produce are incalculable.

It is asserted that the climate of England has a singular tendency to produce melancholy. Of this I cannot judge, for the sky of liberty has always appeared to

me peculiarly pure, but I cannot believe that the frequency of suicide is attributable to physical causes. The northern Heavens are less agreeable than that of England, yet under them there is less disgust to life, because the mind has less need for action and variety. Another circumstance which renders suicide more frequent in England is the extreme importance attached to public opinion: No sooner is the reputation of a man impaired, than life becomes insupportable. This extreme horror of censure, is certainly a very necessary restraint to the greater part of mankind, but there is something infinitely more noble in possessing an asylum within our own hearts, and to find there a sanctuary where the voice of God invites us to repent of our sins, or recompenses us for our good though mistaken intentions.

Suicide rarely takes place amongst the inhabitants of the south. The air they

breathe inspires a love of life, the empire of public opinion has less weight in a country where there is less need for society, the enjoyments of these delightful scenes of nature satisfy equally the great and the little. The spring of Italy is in itself sufficient to diffuse happiness into every human being.

Germany presents many instances of suicide, but the causes are very different, and frequently very capricious, as must naturally be the result among a people where metaphysical enthusiasm predominates, which has no fixed object, or useful end. The defects of the Germans result more from their circumstances than their character, and these they would doubtless easily correct, if there existed among them a political system, calculated to open a career to men who are worthy of being patriots.

An event which has lately taken place at Berlin may afford some idea of the sin-

gular exaltation of which the Germans are susceptible\*, the particular motives which occasioned the error of two individuals, whatever they may be, are of little importance, but the enthusiasm with which some of our cotemporaries have spoken of an action for which we ought to sue for the greatest indulgence, merits the most serious attention. If two persons eminently unfortunate had resorted to death, imploring the compassion of feeling hearts, and recommending themselves to the prayers of

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\* M. de K. and Madame de V. two persons of very estimable characters, departed from Berlin, their usual place of abode, about the close of the year 1811, to an Inn at Potsdam, where they spent some hours in taking refreshment, and in singing together the canticles used on receiving the Lord's Supper. After this, with mutual consent, the man blew out the brains of the lady, and killed himself immediately after. Madame de V. had a father, a husband, and a daughter; Monsieur de K. was a poet, and an officer of merit.

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pious minds, none could have refused their sympathy for the sorrows which deprived them of reason, whatever might be the species of folly it suggested. But can we represent a mutual assassination, as the sublimity of reason, religion, and love? can we give the appellation of virtue to the conduct of a woman who voluntarily absolves herself from the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother? or to a man who makes use of his courage to depart in this way from life?

Yet was this woman so satisfied with the action she committed, as to write in dying, *that she would from the height of Heaven watch over her daughter*; and whilst the righteous frequently tremble on the bed of death, she believed herself secure of the portion of the blessed. Two beings who are termed estimable, admitted religion as a third actor in a scene the most sanguinary and revolting! Two christians compared murder to the holy com-

munion, and leaving open beside them the canticle chaunted by the faithful when they meet to vow obedience to the divine model of resignation and patience. What a delirium in the woman, and what an abuse of his faculties in the man! Might not he be properly termed an assassin, even though he had obtained the consent of the unfortunate being he immolated? Could a momentary impulse of the ever-vacillating *will* give a fellow creature the right of infringing the eternal principles of humanity and justice? It may be said, that the perpetrator of this crime, killed himself almost at the same moment as his friend, but who could imagine he had this ferocious right of property in another's existence, even though he should conceive he was authorized to dispose of his own? But had this man who resolved to die, no country? Could he not combat for her sake? Was there no noble and perilous enterprize in which he might offer a great

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example? What is that, he has given? He surely did not expect that the human race should ever enter into a convention to abdicate the gift of life! And yet, what other consequence could be drawn from the suicide of two beings whose only misfortune it was, that they lived? For these two faithful friends there remained perhaps a year, at least a day, to see each other, to converse together, when by their own act they annihilated this space of happiness. One of these could disfigure the features in which he had read generous thoughts, the other wished no longer to hear the voice which had inspired them in her soul. Yet all this barbarity which should seem to have been prompted by hatred, was called love; in their intercourse we are assured there was the most perfect innocence! And is this enough to justify such ferocious madness? And what advantage do not such delusions give to those, who

consider enthusiasm as an evil? True enthusiasm should unite with reason, which its genial warmth develops. How can opposition be supposed to exist between two qualities common to the human soul, and which are as rays of the same focus?

When reason is said to be incompatible with enthusiasm, calculation is substituted for the one, and folly for the other. There is reason in enthusiasm, and enthusiasm in reason, whenever either of these springs from nature alone, and is pure and unmingled with affectation. One is astonished to find vanity and affectation in a suicide; these sentiments so little and frivolous in life, to what are they not reduced at the hour of death? The strongest feelings alone should seem capable of urging the mind to this most terrible catastrophe; but it is no difficult for man to imagine to himself the end of existence, that he associates the most miserable interests of this world, with the solemn act



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of leaving it, his passions still lingering on the verge of the grave.

In examining the manner in which the double suicide of Berlin was accomplished, it is impossible not to discover sentimental affectation in one of the parties, and philosophical vanity in the other. On the evening of that day, in which the action is to be committed, the mother sends her daughter to the play, as if a parent's death ought to be considered as a festival by the child, whose young heart was thus to receive all the false impressions of a bewildered imagination.

This mother dresses herself in new attire as a holy victim. In the letter addressed to her family; she enters into the most minute domestic details, in order to shew her indifference for the act, she was about to commit—indifference, gracious God, in disposing of one's-self, without thy order, in passing from life to death when neither nature nor duty

aids to pass the abyss.—The man who was soon to become his friend's executioner, partakes with her a banquet, exciting himself with songs and spirituous liquors, as if he dreaded the return of reason. Has not this man the air of an author without genius, ambitious to produce by a real catastrophe, those tragic effects to which he proved unequal in poetry?

In every instance it will be found that true superiority, affects no whimsical singularity, and simply implies an energy more strong, and more intense than is experienced by the mass of men. Genius is, in some respects, popular, and has certain points of contact with the feelings of the majority. It is otherwise with the inflated spirit, or *distempered* imagination: those who pant to triumph over their equals, and to extort attention from the public, are apt to fancy they have made discoveries in some unknown regions of the human

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heart, and even carry this infatuation so far, as to persuade themselves, that what revolts the common sense of mankind, is of a more exalted cast, than what is universally relished and approved: a gigantic vanity, which, if we may use the phrase, turns us out of human nature, and isolates us from our own species. It is for the eloquence and inspiration of genius, to re-animate that latent feeling which exists in the bosom of the most obscure individual, but which has perhaps, been stifled by apathy or vulgar care. It is for nobler minds, by their writings, or their actions, to disperse the ashes which sometimes cover the sacred fire—But to create a new world, wholly strange to human sympathy, in which virtue is made to abandon its duties, religion to revolt from divine authority, and love to immolate what it adores; this is the poor result of sentiments without harmony, and faculties without strength;

of a craving desire for celebrity, to which, the gifts of nature, are wholly inadequate.

It would be needless to enlarge on an act of phrenzy, for which some personal circumstances, unknown to us, might perhaps afford palliation, if this event had not found apologists and almost panegyrist in Germany. The spirit of system, so predominant in German writers, is with them discoverable in almost all the relations of life. In the simple truths already known, there is not sufficient scope to satisfy their energies of mind, and they are as ambitious of innovating in sentiment and conduct, as in literature and criticism. As, however, in all the combinations of art and science, we find nothing to efface our impressions of the glorious sun and the majestic ocean—nothing to destroy our aptitudes to receive pleasure from certain objects in nature, why should not the affections of the heart also be im-

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mutable in their principles, however various in their effects? Is there not much more soul in what is universally felt and understood, than in those human monsters, those abortive inventions of the imagination, crude and incongruous as a fantastic tale.

The gift of existence, is the miracle of every moment ; and there is something so sublime in the Thought and the Sentiment of which it is composed, that one cannot without astonishment contemplate one's being, with those faculties it bestows. And shall we then rashly squander in a moment of impatience, or listlessness, that breath of life, with which we have felt love, cherished genius, and adored the Divinity? Shakspeare says, in speaking of suicide ;

And then what's brave—what's noble,  
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
And make death proud to take us.

But admitting, that we should be incapable of that resignation which reposes on Christian principles, we ought at least to return to the classical beauty of character in the Ancients, and make glory our divinity, even though we should not be worthy to immolate that very glory to a more sublime virtue.

We have shewn that the suicide, whose object is to lay down the burthen of life, bears not the self-devoted, but the self-indulgent character, and consequently is unworthy to inspire enthusiasm. Neither enterprise, nor even courage, merits praise, but as it is the instrument of that generous magnanimity, which can produce greater miracles than genius. Eminent talents do not always ensure success, but the re-union of religious and patriotic views is infallible. Nothing is truly great, in which some virtue does not participate. Every other rule of judgment inevitably leads to error. The

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events of this world, however important they appear to us, are sometimes moved by the smallest springs, in which, chance claims its part; but there can be neither littleness nor casualty in a generous sentiment; whether it impels us to offer our life, or exacts the sacrifice of a single day; whether it earns the crown, or is lost in obscurity and oblivion; whether it inspires *chefs-d'œuvres*, or suggests a simple benefit, all this is nothing; it is a generous sentiment, and by that title alone, ought men to admire the words, or the actions of Man.

Examples of suicide have sometimes occurred in the French nation; but neither melancholy nor enthusiasm has produced them, the action having almost always originated in calamity. In committing it, the sufferers have shewn the intrepidity, and with it the levity, by which the French are often characterized. To their honour, the crowds of

emigrants, created by the revolution, have supported the most cruel privations, with a degree of equanimity, of which no other nation would have been capable; their mind is rather turned to action than reflection, and in this manner to exist, detaches them from the pains of existence. The most severe trial imposed on the Frenchman, is separation from his beloved country; and indeed, of what country had he not to boast, before it was destroyed by faction, and degraded by despotism? What country should we not see revived, if it was the nation that disposed of her?

The imagination presents to itself, that beautiful France, which should re-assemble us under her azure skies; those friends who would weep with joy on again beholding their former companions, those recollections of infancy—those vestiges of our first dearest connexions, which we should retrace at every step:



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such a return would appear to us, as a sort of terrestrial resurrection, as another better life annexed to this below. But if this supreme felicity is not reserved for us by Heaven, in whatever region we may exist, we will pray for that beloved country which must become so glorious, whenever it shall learn to know liberty—that is, when it shall possess the political security established by justice!!

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF LADY JANE  
GREY.

LADY Jane Grey was the great niece of Henry VIII. Her grandmother, Mary, was the sister of that Prince, and the widow of Louis XII. after whose death, she espoused the Duke of Suffolk. Lady Jane Grey had given her hand to Lord Guildford, son of the Duke of Northumberland, who prevailed on Edward VI. to make a will in which he named his daughter-in-law his successor, to the exclusion of the two Princesses, Mary and Elizabeth. To obtain this end, he had represented to the King, that Mary was exceptionable, from her bigotted attachment to the Catholic faith, and Elizabeth excluded by her imputed illegitimacy. His arguments prevailed with the dying Prince, but were unsuccess-

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fully addressed to Lady Jane, till the solicitations of her husband, to whom she was tenderly attached, and over whom, Northumberland had established a complete dominion, extorted from her a reluctant acquiescence. She reigned nine days, or rather, her father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland, reigned under her name. In that interval, Mary triumphed over the partizans of the reformation, and seated herself firmly on the throne. Her cruel vindictive temper was not to be appeased, but by the death of the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Guildford, and Lady Jane Grey, who at the age of eighteen was devoted to the scaffold. At that early period, she was celebrated for her knowledge of the ancient and modern languages, and from some Greek and Latin letters still extant, she appears to have possessed faculties far beyond her age. She was eminently distinguished for piety, and her character was equally

marked by gentleness and dignity. Her ambitious parents had united their solicitations to induce her to ascend the throne, and it was to her mother an exquisite, though short-lived triumph, to bear her daughter's mantle at the inauspicious coronation. During her imprisonment, and when the sentence of death was suspended over her head, an attempt was made by the Duke of Suffolk, to revive the party for Lady Jane. His efforts proved abortive; but on this pretext she was executed, and the Duke of Suffolk was himself sacrificed to the Queen's resentment. The following letter may be supposed to have been written in the month of February, 1554. It is certain that at this period, Lady Jane carried on a regular correspondence with her friends and relations, and that to the last moment she exemplified her philosophical spirit, and preserved her religious fortitude.

LADY JANE GREY TO DR. AYLMEERS.

“It is to you, my worthy friend, that I owe religious instruction, that life of faith which can alone be prolonged to eternity; and in the awful trial to which I am condemned, it is to you that my last thoughts are addressed.

Three months have passed since, at the queen's instigation, the sentence of death was pronounced on me and my husband, in revenge for that unhappy reign of nine days—that crown of thorns which was placed on my unwilling head, only to consign it to destruction. I will frankly own to you, that I believed this sentence to have no other object than that of intimidating my mind. I was far from suspecting that Mary

wished to shed my blood, which was drawn from the same source as her own. I imagined extreme youth might sufficiently excuse my weakness if I did not persist in refusing those fatal honours with which I was menaced, and to which I was at length seduced, only by the deference I conceived to be due to my father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland.

“But I write not to accuse my enemies, they were only instruments in executing the will of God, by whom this, and every other event of life has been directed, and I have now no leisure to spare from my personal feelings. Shut up in this Tower, I exist but in my own sensations, and my moral and religious conduct is confined to my own internal conflicts.

Yesterday, I was surprised by a visit from our friend, Ascham, the sight of whom, at first, gave me a lively pleasure, by awakening the memory of those hours

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so delicious and so instructive, which I have spent with him in studying the pages of classical antiquity. My first impulse was to speak of these illustrious dead, who had opened to me such a boundless field of reflection. Ascham, you remember, though serious is serene; he makes old age a prop to support the evils of existence; and in reality, the old age of a reflective being is not feeble, since it is fortified by faith and experience, and when so short a space remains, a small effort is sufficient to arrive at the goal. This narrow space is not yet shorter for me than an old man; but bitter will be the sufferings accumulated on my last moments.

Ascham announced, that the queen had given me permission to walk in the garden of my prison. It is impossible to express with what transports of joy I received the welcome intimation; at first, our poor friend had

not courage to disturb them. We descended together to the garden, where he suffered me for some time to enjoy that face of nature from which I had been so long an exile. It was one of those fine days at the end of winter, which announce the approach of spring, and I know not whether the spring itself could have produced on my imagination so vivid an impression, as this presage of its return. The trees turned their leafless branches towards the sun, the turf was already green; a few early flowers, seemed with their perfumes to prelude the melody of nature, when she should reappear in all her magnificence. There was an indescribable sweetness in the air; me thought I heard the voice of God in the invisible yet omnipotent breath, which every moment gave me back new life—life! what word have I pronounced? Till this day I considered it as my right, and I now



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receive its last benefits as the tender farewell of a friend.

I proceeded with Ascham to the borders of the Thames, where we sat down in a wood, which though now bare of foliage, was soon to be re clothed with verdure. The waves glittering with the reflected light of Heaven, had the magnificent aspect of a festival, still was there something melancholy in their course, and I know not who could long trace their monotonous movements, without yielding to those reveries, the supreme charm of which resides in a sort of detachment from existence. Ascham perceiving the direction of my thoughts, suddenly took my hand, and bathing it with his tears, exclaimed, Oh you, who still are my sovereign, must it be my hard task to apprise you of your impending fate? Your father has collected your partizans in opposition to Mary, who revenges herself on you, for all the love your name inspires.

Here sobs choked his utterance. "Continue," I exclaimed, "my friend, recollect those meditative sages, who have watched with a steady eye the death even of those who were most dear to them, they knew from whence we came, and whither we go."

"Well," replied he, "your sentence must now be executed; but I bring you that succour which has delivered so many illustrious men from the proscription of tyrants." Then did this venerable old man offer me with trembling hands, the poison from which he would have preserved me at the hazard of his own existence. I recollected how often we had admired together, the noble contempt of life, evinced by the heroes and patriots of antiquity, and sinking into deep thought, (as if the light of christianity had been suddenly extinguished in my soul.) I fell into that feeble indecision, from which in the most simple circumstances of life it is often so

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difficult to withdraw the mind. Ascham threw himself on his knees before me, bending his silvered head towards the earth, and covering his eyes with one hand, whilst with the other he presented to me the fatal resource he had prepared. I repulsed gently that sacred hand, and having collected myself in secret prayer, found strength to make this reply: "Ascham, you know with what delight I have read with you the philosophers and the poets of Greece and Rome; the masculine beauties of their language, which breathe the simple energy of their soul, are incomparable. Society, as it is now constituted, has filled most minds with vanity and frivolity, and one is not ashamed to live without reflecting, without seeking to know the miracles of the world, which are formed to enlighten man by symbols at once splendid and permanent." We are surpassed by the Ancients since they were left to themselves, and be-

came what they were by their own efforts, whilst to us Revelation has imparted a principle superior to man; and every thing from the ideal perfection of the arts, to the simple rules of conduct, should correspond with religious faith, since life has no end but to prepare for immortality.

If I could escape this public exposure, were I to steal from the signal calamity which awaits me, I should fail to fortify by my example the hope of those who may be touched by my fate. The Ancients elevated their soul by the contemplation of their own strength; the christian has one witness constantly before his eyes, one in whose presence he must either live or die. The Ancients aspired to glorify human nature—the christian considers himself but as the manifestation of God on earth. The Ancients magnified beyond every other virtue the heroism which prefers death to the oppressor—the christian hallows more the devoted

spirit which embraces whatever is the will of providence: in him Activity, and patience reign by turns. We are to exert the *will* as long as we can serve others, and advance our own progress to perfection; but when destiny is in a manner confronted with us, it is then the part of courage to await her approach, and more noble to meet, than to evade the stroke. The soul concentrates itself in its own mysteries, and its most sublime effort is resignation. "I will not," replied Ascham, "discuss with you these opinions at a time when firmness may be so necessary to your support. I am chiefly disturbed by the nature of the suffering, to which you are condemned. How can you sustain so rude a shock? This fearful anticipation of the mortal stroke the fixed inevitable hour? Would it not be less cruel to terminate your fate by your own hands?" "It is our duty," returned I, "to wait till the Divine Being shall resume the gift he

has bestowed. Immortality commences before death, when, with our own consent, we part from the interests of life. In such a moment the internal impressions of the soul are more delicious than can be conceived. The source of enthusiasm becomes independent of the objects that surround us, God alone fills up the sanctuary in the recesses of the soul, and in himself includes our destiny."

"But," replied Ascham, "why must you give to your enemies, to this cruel queen, to that depraved people, the unworthy spectacle?" He was unable to finish. "Were I to escape," replied I, "even by death, from the queen's vengeance, I should but irritate her pride, without becoming instrumental to her repentance. Who knows at what remote period the example I am about to offer, shall be salutary to my fellow-creatures, and how can I judge of the importance which history shall assign to my remembrance."

“By destroying myself, I shall only teach men the horror so justly inspired by outrage, and display the pride which anticipates its release. But by submitting to this terrible fate, with the firmness which religion bestows, I shall be as a beacon to the unfortunate, who like me are tossed about in the storm, and who may thus learn to commit themselves to that Anchor of faith by which I have been sustained.”

“The people,” said Ascham, “attribute guilt to those who perish on the scaffold.” “Falsehood,” replied I, “may deceive some individuals during a few short years, but nations and Ages, celebrate the triumphs of truth. Whatever belongs to virtue belongs also to eternity; and every action performed for her sake, shall flow on to that immense ocean, though the individual may have been but a nameless rivulet, in her mortal course. No—I shall not blush to endure the punishment in-

inflicted on guilt; I am called to it by innocence. To commit an outrage would disturb the security which innocence inspires, and destroy that serenity the soul ought to feel on approaching heaven."

"But," exclaimed our friend, "what can be so violent as this bloody death?" "Is not the blood of the martyrs," replied I, "a balm for the wounds of the afflicted?"

"That death," resumed he, "inflicted by the barbarous axe, which a barbarian shall dare to lay upon your royal head."

"My friend," returned I, "were my last moments crowned with glory, they could not weaken my impressions of dread. Does death wear a diadem on his livid brow? Is he not always armed with the same ghastly terrors? If it were but to annihilation that he dragged us, what would it avail us to dispute with an empty shadow? but if he come as the messenger of Heaven, if it be the voice of God that is heard from that Vail of darkness,



then is day behind night, and eternity is concealed from us only by vain phantoms." "But," exclaimed our friend, (who, instead of his wonted serenity, was now so agitated as scarcely to command his voice,) "are you aware that the punishment may be painful, that it may be prolonged, that an unsteady hand—" "Stop," cried I, "I am aware of this—but what you fear cannot happen—and what gives you this confidence?" "My own weakness," I have always dreaded physical suffering—all my efforts to acquire the courage which braves pain have been unavailing: I am assured therefore that this trial will be always spared me; a secret protection awaits the Christian when he appears most desolate, nor is he permitted to experience any trial beyond his strength. We are usually acquainted only with the external character of man—what passes within his breast might afford new views during millions

of ages. Irreligion renders the mind superficial, and one attaches too much importance to circumstance and success. The true treasure of thought and imagination is to be found only in the commerce of the human heart, with its creator. Thence came the presages, the oracles, the prodigies, whatever the ancients imagined they discovered in nature, was but a reflection of what passed in their own souls, the whisper of the unknown Divinity that dwelt within them." We had now an interval of silence, when I was seized with an indescribable emotion of terror, and a sentiment I ventured not to express hung on my lips. At length I asked Ascham if he had seen my husband: He replied in the affirmative. "Go on," then, cried I, "for mercy's sake, tell me all. If Guildford and my conscience were opposed, which of the two powers would appear most sacred?" "Lord Guildford," replied he, "has expressed no opinion

on the part you ought to take, but, for himself, it is his unalterable resolution to perish on the scaffold." "Oh! my friend," exclaimed I, "how do I thank you for having left me the merit of choice. Had I sooner known my Guildford's decision, I should not have been at the pains to deliberate. Love alone would have dictated what religion commands. Shall I not partake the fate of such a husband? Shall I spare myself one of his sufferings? In every step he makes towards death, has he not traced my own course?" Perceiving I was inflexible, Ascham sorrowfully took leave, but with a promise to revisit my prison.

Doctor Fackeham, the Queen's chaplain, came a few hours after to announce that my execution was to take place on Friday, which is now only five days distant. Let me confess to you, I seemed wholly unprepared for the stroke,—so much did an irrevocable nomination of the

day increase my terror. I attempted to conceal my emotion, but it was doubtless perceived by Feckenham, who took advantage of my confusion to offer life on condition that I should change my religion: thus you see, my worthy friend, God dispensed his assistance; since the necessity of repulsing such an insult, restored to me the courage I had lost.

Doctor Feckenham was desirous to engage me in a controversy, which I declined; observing, "that my understanding was too much enfeebled by my present situation to allow me to do justice to my own arguments, and that I would not in my dying moments expose to controversy those truths, of which I had been persuaded when my mind was in its full strength." He attempted to intimidate me, by saying, "he should then meet me no more, either in this world or the next, since I was excluded from heaven by my unbelief." I replied, "your words

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would be more terrible to me than my executioner, if I could believe them, but that religion for which one is ready to offer up life, the heart pronounces to be true. On such abstruse questions reason lends but dubious light ; I hold my faith on the principle of sacrifice, for of that I cannot doubt."

The conversation with Dr. Feckenham revived my spirits. Providence having thus afforded what Ascham was so anxious to obtain for me, a voluntary death, I "destroyed not my own being ; but I refused to live, and the scaffold thus freely embraced, seemed but the altar chosen by the victim." To renounce life when it could alone be purchased at the price of conscience, is the only suicide permitted to virtue.

Satisfied with the conviction, that I had embraced my duty, I was beginning to resume my courage, when suddenly, that fond attachment to existence of which I

have sometimes been but too sensible, in the days of my felicity, revived in my feeble heart.

“ Ascham came to me on the following day, and we once more walked on the banks of the Thames, the pride of our beautiful country! I attempted to enter on our ordinary subjects of conversation; and recited some passages from the poetry of Homer and Virgil, whose immortal works we had so often studied together: but poetry, more than any thing, has a tendency to infuse into us a tender enthusiasm for existence, so seducingly does it blend thoughts and images with each other;—so delightful is the union of nature and sentiment, and so much are we alive to its harmonious language, in which the strongest feelings of the soul are traced, that as we read we are inspired, and are at once intoxicated with the faculties of existence and enjoyment.

“ It was thus I became impressed when

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I recollected it was no longer for me those pleasures existed. I then turned the conversation on the more severe writings of the philosophers. Ascham considers Plato as a soul predestined to Christianity, though, in common with the majority of the Ancients, he exulted too proudly in the intellectual prowess of the human mind. Those sages enjoyed so intensely the faculty of thought, as scarcely to direct their wishes towards a better state of being, which they seemed to invoke by the energy of contemplation. Formerly, I also tasted the most exquisite delight in meditating on heaven, on genius, and nature. At this recollection, a senseless regret of life took possession of my mind, and in such vivid colours was it now depicted to my imagination, that the future world appeared no longer but as a cold abstraction.

“How,” cried I, “shall I learn to prefer the eternal duration of sentiments,

to that incessant alternation of hope and fear, which so vividly renews the most tender affections? Can the unlimited knowledge of nature and her mysteries, ever possess the inexpressible attraction of that veil which conceals them? Shall certainty ever disperse the flattering illusions of doubt, or can the splendid revelation of truth create as many sources of enjoyment as are now supplied by its discovery or pursuit? And what shall become of youth and hope, our habits and affections, when time exists no more? In one word, can the omnipotent Creator, in all his glory, offer to his creature a gift more precious than mutual Love?

“These fears were impious, and it is with sincere contrition that I confess to you, my worthy friend, the contemptible weakness.” Ascham, who on the preceding evening had appeared to be less religious than myself, soon resumed his ascendancy over my refractory spirit. “You



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ought not," said he, "to suffer the benefits you have received to excite distrust of the Benefactor who has created that life whose loss you deplore : if its few imperfect pleasures appear to you so precious, why should you conceive them to be irreparable? It is surely not difficult for the imagination to conceive a world more delightful than this earth ; but should this be beyond our power, is it for us to consider the Deity merely as a poet, who is unable to produce a second work superior to the first?" This simple reflection recalled me to myself, and I blushed at the imbecility to which I had been betrayed by the dread of death.

"Oh, my friend, how difficult is it to fathom this thought ! The farther I descend, the more is it impenetrable, abyss opens beneath abyss —— !

"In four days I shall breathe no more ; the bird that flutters in the air shall survive me : my span of existence is shorter

than his—the inanimate objects by which I am surrounded shall preserve the same form, but I shall be wholly changed. In the memory of my friends alone shall I hold any place on earth—incomprehensible mystery of the mind, which foresees the end, and is yet unable to conceive its approach—the hand checks the coursers that conduct us in our career; but thought cannot, for one moment, prevail against *death*—forgive my weakness, oh Parent of my faith, you whom I have ever revered—you by whom I have been so tenderly beloved. Assuredly we shall meet in heaven, but shall I ever hear again that all-persuasive voice which announced to me a God of mercy? shall I ever more behold your venerable features, so indelibly traced on remembrance? and thou too, Guildford, my husband, my other self—thou whose divine countenance is always present to my soul, shall I re-

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recognize thee, such as thou art, among angels, whose image thou hast borne on earth? but what would I say? my feeble soul could form no dearer wish beyond the tomb, than to return to the felicity I possessed, and with thee to perpetuate my departed existence."

*Thursday.*

"Yesterday my beloved husband requested to see me for the last time. I refused myself a moment in which joy and despair would have met together, lest I should be no longer resigned. You are aware that my heart was but too fondly attached to happiness, and I had but too much reason to fear I should relapse into my former weakness. Was I not right, my father?"

"After such a sacrifice, is not my frailty expiated? I have no longer cause to dread that existence can be too dear to me."

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*On the Day of Execution.*

"Oh, my father, I have seen him—he

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advanced to the scene of execution with as firm a step as if he had commanded those by whom he was conducted. Guildford once turned his eyes to my prison—then raised them above.—(I understood his meaning) and proceeded. When he reached the path leading to the spot, where death was prepared for us both, he stopped once more, and thus, with his last looks, blessed her, who was equally his partner on the *throne* and the *scaffold*.”

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### *An Hour after.*

“The remains of Guildford have been conveyed under the windows of the Tower. The mutilated body was covered, but through the shroud what a horrible image glared before me! If the same stroke was not reserved for me, how should I support the burthen of grief?

“Oh, my father, is it possible, I have even regretted life? O holy death—

## 118 REFLECTIONS UPON SUICIDE.

blessed gift of heaven, no less precious than life—thou art now my tutelary angel—thou only dost restore me to serenity and peace. My sovereign master has disposed of my destiny, but since he has permitted my reunion with my husband, he exacts nothing beyond my strength, and to him without fear, I commend my departing spirit.”

THE END.



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### ERRATA.

Page 34, line 19, *for* to satiate, *read* to tantalize.

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